

VIRGINS IN BROTHELS: GENDER AND RELIGIOUS ECOTYPIFICATION

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For Galit and Dina, נרן יאיר

“Charlotte, we’re Jewish” says Cher in the opening scene of *Mermaids*, as she passes her adolescent daughter, Wynona Ryder genuflecting ecstatically at her private shrine to St. Perpetua.

Charlotte abandons her worship of the martyr with a rather dramatic effect on her nascent sex life. What might it be about a young Christian woman tortured to death in the arena in third century North Africa that would so attract an American Jewish teenager as a model and ego ideal? In this lecture, I will investigate the figure of the virgin girl in both traditions, first as an ego-ideal for men and then as one for women, with startlingly different conclusions to the two analyses.¹

VIRGIN RABBIS, VIRGIN FATHERS

According to the Talmud [Avoda Zara 16b-18b], Rabbi Eli‘ezer was once arrested by the Romans on suspicion of Christianity. Upon being cleared of this charge via tricksterism, he worries what fault God had found in him that he allowed him to suffer this embarrassment, and finally remembers that he had indeed been too familiar with a disciple of Jesus, thus transgressing the verse: “Keep her ways far away from you, and do not come near to the opening of her door” [Proverbs 5:8]. The Talmud continues with a typical midrashic exploration of the precise referent of “her” in the verse:

“Keep her [the “Strange Woman’s”] ways far away from you!” – This [refers] to heresy.
 “And do not come near to the opening of her door” – This is the government.
 There are those who say: “Keep her ways far away from you!” – This is sectarianism and the government. “And do not come near to the opening of her door” – This is the prostitute.

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This is a modified and condensed version of a chapter of my forthcoming book (Boyarin 1999). The text is as delivered at the ISFNR congress in Göttingen and only the notes have been added. I have thanked all those who aided me so much in the production of this text *in situ*, as it were.

¹ Perpetua herself was, of course, not a virgin, but, in fact a mother. One of the arguments of (Burrus 1995b), owever, is that the very relevance of the figure of the virgin is particularly coming to the fore in the fourth century.

The association of negative Jewish behavior – either seduction by Christianity or by secular power – with the lust of the male customer of the prostitute is crucial to the main theme of the text, the transformation of the chaste Jewish male – and indeed the Jewish People – into female virgin as the one most fit to resist such sexualized enticements.

The gendering of heresy, i.e., Christianity, is supported by the fact that in the Proverbs verse that which one is enjoined to keep away from is “her ways.” The literal subject of the verse is the seductive “strange woman,” whose very lips drip honey but whose denouement is bitter. It is important to recognize here a major metaphorical shift. For the Prophets, the dominant metaphor is of a female Israel gone-a-whoring with myriad lovers, while here we find an Israel figured as a lustful male tempted sorely by a seductive female. This shift of metaphor of straying Israel from female to male is accomplished by repeatedly reading figures of sexual danger from Proverbs as if they were allegories for religious temptations and dangers. Foreign whores and seductive daughters are transformed into heresies and seductions of collaboration, thus rendering their illicit male partner, the errant Jews.² At first glance, this claim may seem strange, since I and others have been arguing so strenuously that the rabbis see themselves as feminized (Boyarin 1997). However, on further reflection, there is no paradox here at all, for precisely, if the negative, the abjected, image of self is of the lustful male, the valorized image is of the virgin female. We can find an explicit modern pendant for this theory in Ramakrishna’s exhortation to his disciples to “become woman,” in order to transcend their own sexual desire to be with women: “A man can change his nature by imitating another’s character. By transposing on to yourself the attributes of woman, you gradually destroy lust and the other sensual drives. You begin to behave like women.”³ By the time we reach the end of the talmudic narrative, we shall see that the female virgin is indeed an object of identification for the Rabbis, in much the same way that Virginia Burrus has taught us that she performed symbolically for contemporary Christians, such as Ambrose of Milan. As we will see below through reading Burrus’s work, this contemporary of the Rabbis also urges self feminization as an antidote to the perceived evils of the male psyche. In both late ancient Christianity and Judaism, ideal male identity was secured in part via cross-gender identification with female virgins. Affinities, it seems, run strong and deep. Furthermore, close study of Burrus’s feminist textual analyses has enabled me to see other (gendered) patterns and meanings

² In the rabbinic text, the “foreign woman” of Proverbs, almost a perennial source of sexual excitement in many human cultures, becomes the primary metaphor for all that is exotic to Jews and thus alluring, whether political power or seductive foreign cults. Jews are faced with the dual temptations of collaboration with oppressors or of assimilation into the dominant cultural forms. Either of those seductive options provide an escape from the sometimes unbearable tensions of difference. They provide two means of being like all of the nations. On my reading it is precisely the allure of these two avenues of flight from the tensions of diasporized Jewish existence that is central to the text and it is these diversions that are thematized as being similar to the forms of escape that sexual pleasure provides as well.

³ Gospel, 176, qtd (Roy 1998:97-98).

in the talmudic passage that have not been seen before, and the differences are as interesting as the similarities. In this paper, I will suggest that the terminology of ecotypification is effective for capturing the relationship between these subcultural formations, particularly insofar as they are expressed in narrative.

One of the common themes of late ancient Jewish and Christian narrative is the martyrology (Boyarin 1998b). Close reading of the continuation of the talmudic legend will help us discover the different ecotypifications of gendered narratives in these two nascent “religions”:

Our [ancient] Rabbis have taught: When Rabbi Yose the son of Kisma became ill, Rabbi Hanina the son of Teradion went to visit him. He [Yose] said to him: “Hanina, my brother, Don’t you know that this nation was set to rule over us by Heaven, and it has destroyed His house, and burned His temple, and killed his saints, and destroyed his goodly things, and still it exists, and I have heard that you gather crowds together in public, with a Scroll of the Torah in your lap, and you sit and teach!” He [Hanina] said to him, “From Heaven they will have mercy.” He [Yose] said to him, “I say logical things to you, and you answer me: ‘From Heaven they will have mercy!’ I will be surprised if they do not burn you and the Scroll of the Torah with you.”

Rabbi Hanina is indeed arrested and executed for insurrection – and indeed the Torah Scroll is burnt too –, and in accord with Roman practice, his daughter is punished as well, by sent to a brothel. Immediately after describing the punishments of the members of Rabbi Hanina’s family, the text explains why God has allowed them to be so maltreated:

Him to burning, for he used to pronounce the Holy Name literally. How is it possible that he did such a thing?! For we have a tradition that Abba Shaul says that also one who pronounces the Holy Name literally has no place in the World to Come. He did it for the purpose of self-instruction, for as another tradition says: ‘Do not learn to do’ [pronouncing God’s name; Deut. 18:9], but you may learn in order to understand and to teach.” [If that is the case], why was he punished? Because he used to pronounce the Holy Name literally in public, and it says “This is my eternal name” [Exodus 3:15], but the word “eternal” is spelt as if it meant “for hiding”. And his daughter to sit in a prostitute’s booth, for Rabbi Yoḥanan said: She was once walking among the great of Rome, and they said, “How beautiful are the steps of this maiden!” And she immediately became more careful about her steps. And this is what Resh Lakish has said: “The sin of my heels will ambush me” [Psalms 49:6]. The sins that a person steps out with his heels in this world will ambush him at the Judgment Day.

The explanations of the punishment of the Rabbi and of his daughter are doublets and highly gendered in their implications. Rabbi Hanina himself was condemned for doing something in public that he should have done in private. The two explanations for his punishment, namely the “realistic” one, that the Romans had arrested him for illegally teaching Torah in public and the theodical one, that God had arrested him for revealing his name to the public have to be

read as comments upon each other. It was appropriate, indeed, for him to be pronouncing God's name as it is written and with its vowels in order to instruct himself, but this activity needed to be carried in private, *just as his study and teaching of Torah ought to have been in private according to Rabbi Yose the son of Kisma*. God's name was given for hiding, not for public exposure to the eyes of the hostile Romans. In other words, the text is proposing a homology between the reasons for Rabbi Ḥanina's capture by the Romans at both the pragmatic and the theological levels. God has meant the teaching of Torah to be a private, internal activity for the Jewish People in a hostile world, a "hidden transcript," and not a matter of provocation and defiance. Resistance, according to Rabbi Yose ben Kisma's view – the trickster party in rabbinic Judaism-, consists of doing what we do without getting into trouble and using evasiveness in order to keep doing it.

As I have suggested, however, Rabbi Ḥanina's own sin, the sin of public exposure of the Torah to the gaze of Others is then doubled by the sin of his daughter. Exposed to the predatory male gaze, ethnicized as both "Roman" and the province of the powerful males of Rome, she does not evade the gaze but seeks to enhance her object-status further. Having thus rendered herself sexual object, she is punished by being turned into a whore, the ultimate depersonalized sexual object. Although the text is couched in the form of a critique of the woman here, and that (unfair) judgment, that blaming of the victim if you will, ought not to be papered over in our reading, at the same time there is encoded here a critique of the male gaze itself. It is no accident that it is the important men of Rome who are represented at this moment; they are the proverbial (or stereotyped) "construction workers" for this text. The daughter's story then doubles the critique of her father's provocative behavior. Through this doubling the approved practice for Jews is gendered feminine, while the behavior of the Roman is gendered masculine. The violence of their gaze is contiguous with the greater violence of their bloodshed, and the resistance of the Jew is to be veiled: "eternal" through being "in hiding," as the double-meaning of the verse implies. Remain indoors, as it were. Continue to live, continue to maintain Jewish practice, but do not behave in ways that draw attention to us or provoke the hostile intervention of the ruling powers. Thus, if we return to the terms of the contestation above, the text once more seemingly endorses the view of Rabbi Yose the son of Kisma that the trickster is to be preferred over the martyr but does not by any means entirely erase or deligitmate the way of Rabbi Ḥanina either.

The end, however, of the daughter's story is once more highly illuminating. In her ultimate redemption, and via the mode by which she preserves herself, she will be installed, an archetypal female virgin, as a positively marked, valorized model for Jewish masculinity:

Beruria, the wife of Rabbi Me'ir was the daughter of Rabbi Ḥanina. She said to him:

It is painful to me that my sister is sitting in a prostitute's booth. He took a *tarqeva* of dinars and went, saying if she has done nothing wrong [i.e., if she is sexually innocent], there will be a miracle, and if not, there will be no miracle. He dressed up as a soldier and solicited her. She said: I am menstruating.⁴ He said: I can wait. She said: There are many here more beautiful than I. He said: I understand from this that she has done nothing wrong. He went to her guard: Give her to me! The guard said: I am afraid of the king. He [Me'ir] took the *tarqeva* of dinars, and gave it to him, and said: Take the *tarqeva* of dinars. Keep half and use half for bribing anyone who comes. He [the guard] said: What shall I do when they are gone? He [Me'ir] said: Say 'God of Me'ir save me' and you will be saved. He [guard] said: How do I know that this will be so? He [Me'ir] said: [Now you will see.] There came some dogs that eat people. He shouted to them, and they came to eat him. He said: 'God of Me'ir save me,' and they let him go. He let her go.

In contrast to a Polyxena or a Perpetua, the daughter of Rabbi Ḥanina does not stand up to her oppressors and defend her chastity in a demonstrative way thus bringing upon her their wrath and her death. Rather she tricks her way out of the situation through lies and wiles (rather like the Three Billy Goats Gruff and their troll from European folklore). All that is necessary, however, for God to perform miracles and for her to be saved is that she succeed at the task. The "dishonorable" means are totally irrelevant.

Lest we think, however, that the counsel of tricksterism is intended only for women, the text goes on to immediately disable such a reading:

The matter became known in the house of the king. They brought him [the guard] and crucified him. He said 'God of Me'ir save me,' and they took him down and asked: What was that? He told them: This is how the events took place. They wrote it on the gates of the city, and they engraved Rabbi Me'ir's face on the gates of Rome and said: If a man who looks like this comes, arrest him! When Rabbi Me'ir came there, they wished to arrest him. He ran away from them and *went into a whorehouse*. Elijah came in the guise of a whore and embraced him. *Some say that he put his hand in Gentile foods and tasted them*. They [the Romans] said: God forbid! If that were Rabbi Me'ir he wouldn't do such a thing. Because of these events [Rabbi Me'ir] ran away to Babylonia.

The most striking aspect of this sequence is, of course, the escape via entering into the whorehouse and, moreover, disguising himself, once more, as a customer of the prostitutes. This time, however, it is not to test the chastity of someone else but to save his own skin. Just, however, as it was considered by the Jewish text entirely proper for the young woman to pretend to acquiescence in prostitution in order to preserve her life, so it is entirely proper for Rabbi Me'ir to disguise himself and pretend to (or maybe actually) violate the Jewish law in order to keep himself alive, in accord with the principle that the commandments are given to live by and not to die by. Rabbi Me'ir runs away to Babylonia, the safer place

⁴ See below n. 28.

for the study of Torah, and not so incidentally the place where this story was formulated. In the end, then, there is a perfect analogy between the male Rabbi and the young female Jew and in addition the thematic material of the entire text is brought together in a culminating fashion. The association between the Roman government and its blandishments and dangers and the house of prostitution is reprised, and the text opens up to its final moral and nearly allegorical meanings in which the Jewish People is figured no more as a man, Jacob, even a feminized man, but as a woman. It is now Rabbi Me'ir, the paragon of male virtue, who preserves his chastity in the whorehouse. As Laurie Davis has arrestingly phrased it, "the rabbis see themselves as virgins in a brothel" (Davis 1994).

ANDROGYNY AND THE LION

In this text, which insists on the representation of the Christian heresy as a beautiful prostitute who tempts the male Jewish People away from God, the Rabbis seem very close precisely to those Christian ascetics who at exactly the same period were also using the female virgin as their most valorized exemplar. The harlot, moreover, was similarly a privileged metaphor for heresy among fourth-century Christians as well. These Christians were tangled with power and prestige in the Empire in highly complex and nuanced ways. As Burrus has put it: "To state the thesis in general terms: post-Constantinian Christianity lays claim to the power of classical male speech; yet at the same time late ancient Christian discourse continues to locate itself in paradoxical relation to classical discourse through a stance of feminizing ascesis that renounces public speech" (Burrus 1995b:44).⁵ As Burrus unveils, within the very discourse of the late fourth century Ambrose and Prudentius, there are knotty and intricate elements of resistance to the dominant (Roman) discourse of masculinity and masculine sexuality in particular. This resistance or reconception of masculinity is achieved in no small measure by "thinking with" virgins.

We find an important shift taking place in fourth century Christian discourse. Earlier Christian texts frequently, as is well known by now, represent the possibility for a virilization of the female, whether martyr, Perpetua or apostle, Thecla (Castelli, E. A., I 1991).⁶ It could be argued, indeed, that in the earliest periods of Christianity, there is a radical critique of Graeco-Roman gender discourses and sexual dimorphism *tout court*. This critique is represented in large part through "gender-bending" attacks on female subordination, such as the famous early story

⁵ See also the concise description of the relevant political conditions for the shifts in Christian representations of virginity in her (Burrus 1994:44).

⁶ While in earlier work, scholars read these representations as manifesting "genuine" spaces of autonomy for women in early Christian culture, especially owing to their origins as "folks narrative," e.g. (Burrus 1987), more recently these same scholars are inclined to see male representations of self via complex and contradictory identifications with female figures (Burrus 1995b; Burrus 1996)

in which Jesus promises to make Mary male.⁷ Although, obviously, we should be very chary of ascribing “feminist” motives to such representations, it seems that the stance of drastic alienation from the Roman world and all of its works, including marriage, led to this burst of imagination, at least, of female power and autonomy (Burrus 1987).⁸ In the second century, we find Perpetua who is marked as the Christian resister to the Roman culture of gender precisely through her “ability to stare directly back into the faces of her persecutors, not with the elusive demeanour of a proper *matrona*” but with a returned gaze that “broke with the normative body language in a way that signalled an aggressiveness that was not one of conventional femininity” (Shaw 1993:4), and slightly before her, Blandina whose “fortitude and endurance were compared to those of a victorious male athlete” (Shaw 1993:19). In contrast to these virile, masculinized female martyrs of the second century, Burrus has shown that in the fourth century, we have a much more complex structure of gender, in which both the masculinized aggressivity of the female martyr as *virago* and an almost contradictory feminized passivity as *virgo* are being produced simultaneously (Burrus 1995b:41). In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, Thecla is saved by a *female* lion who herself dies in the arena protecting the virgin from the attack of a male lion, a powerful icon then, not only of resistance to the family values of the ancient city, but of female autonomy and solidarity. In Ambrose’s version of the same story, the male lion himself “becomes female” and abandons his attack on the girl. In other words, that which was once unambiguously counter-cultural, subversive with respect to Rome and its gendered hierarchies and representations, has now become highly ambiguous, almost fluid in its meanings. No longer the victorious, valorous, virilized gladiator, à la Perpetua, the fourth-century virgin martyr is now partially rewritten as a model of passive, female virtue.

The female martyr remained a highly charged symbol, owing to her subversions of sexuality, but she functioned now most readily as an example for the male ascetic. As virilized woman, she could have functioned as an ego-ideal for Christian women, an ideal that conduces to overturning of gendered hierarchies and even of gender itself as signified by Thecla’s lioness and her own androgynous mien. As passive virgin, mirrored by the feminized male lion in the fourth-century rewriting, she is no longer a figure for the virilized female but rather for the feminized male, the male who upon perceiving her, like the lion, is inspired to – which is not to say that he achieves – a complete renunciation of his “naturally” violent, leonine, male sexuality. The masculinization and pluralization of the lions

⁷ (Meyer 1985), and see next note.

⁸ Joyce Salisbury effectively contrasts the first or second century Jewish 4 Maccabees in which the martyred woman is martyred as a mother, and “[T]his martyrdom was about preserving family identity and piety in the face of oppression,” and that of Perpetua, in which after some ambivalence, finally, the milk in Perpetua’s breasts dries up, and “the baby had no further desire for the breast.” Salisbury remarks: “This seeming evidence of divine approval in the text reinforced the notion that martyrdom was incompatible with maternity. The time of the Maccabean mothers was over; martyrdom was a matter of private conscience, not family ties” (Salisbury 1997:88 and 91).

in the Ambrose version is, as Burrus discerns, significant of their transformation into an icon of the audience watching the martyrdom (and the audience reading the martyrology), at least insofar as these are male. This audience (and the writers/readers) are thus called upon to identify both with the lion and with the victim of that lion, thus both the figure of an oppressive male and of a resistant virgin. One way of saying this would be that in the earlier version, one could imagine at least a female subjectivity behind, in some sense, the text. The implied author *could* be female. The implied author of Ambrose's text is unambiguously, if complexly, gendered male. Thus the virgin becomes available for male identification (Burrus 1995b:32).⁹

This point is made by Burrus: "For men, the pursuit of Christian asceticism entailed the rejection of public life and therefore of the hierarchies of office and gender; in this respect, their opponents were not far off the mark when they insinuated that male ascetics were 'feminized' through their rejection of the most basic cultural expressions of male identity" (Burrus 1995a:14). Burrus observes, for instance, that Sulpicius Severus, a Gallic ascetic squarely synchronous with our talmudic text, like Ambrose his contemporary and associate, explicitly identifies women and especially virginal women as his models for the ascetic life of retirement and withdrawal from public exposure and activity. "Sulpicius' special interest in virginal women is in large part attributable, I think, to the fact that it is women in general and virginal women in particular who traditionally model the life of complete retirement and avoidance of public exposure." Burrus concludes that "Sulpicius puts forth the radical suggestion that the male must indeed 'become female' through his ascetic renunciation of public life" (Burrus 1992). This parallels the becoming female of the Rabbis through their ascetic renunciations of intercourse with alluring Christianity or participation in the Roman State. The Rabbis, as well, adopted distinctly feminized stances of renunciation of political power (Boyarin 1997:81-126). As Burrus remarks, "Sulpicius presents the virgin as an ideal of which Martin [of Tours] acknowledges himself to fall short, compromised by his episcopal office and also, I would add, by his very maleness" (Burrus 1992). Like our Rabbis, the male must become female in order to escape the moral dangers of his masculine state.

In our talmudic text, the Rabbis are close, *mutatis mutandis*, to those ascetics for whom the virgin was a model for a life of withdrawal from public exposure. *Mutatis mutandis*, for the withdrawal of a Roman aristocrat from the public cannot, once more, be identical to the withdrawal of Jewish Sage. Insofar as the female virgin is being utilized by male cultural products as a mode of negotiation of their critical, resisting, accommodating, alienated, envious, and other stances

⁹ This female lion in the earlier text, I would argue, supports the earlier readings of the Apocryphal Acts as narratives of female autonomy and perhaps even female authored narratives (Davies 1980). See especially (Burrus 1987) in this regard. In my opinion, the retreat from this position has been too precipitous. Cf. for instance (Cooper 1992a).

toward Roman power and cultural prestige, different positionings with respect to “Rome” will result in different virgins. In other words, the first relevant factor in ecotypification for these folk narratives is a political/social one. As a tentative hypothesis, I would offer the following: Identification with the female virgin is a mode for both Rabbis and Fathers of disidentification with a “Rome” whose power is stereotyped as a highly sexualized male. Both groups are engaged in complex, tangled, and ambivalent negotiations of self-fashionings in response to their attraction and repulsion from that Rome. Each, however, occupies a different space within the economies of power and ethnic emplacement in the Empire. On the one hand, Christian writers, even as late as the fourth or fifth centuries, were frequently former Roman “pagans”, sons of power and prestige in imperial society and highly educated and identified with classical culture. It is highly telling that both Ambrose and Prudentius were formerly provincial governors (Burrus 1995b:34). Their renunciation of such identification and certain forms of power and prestige is thus both more dramatic (for being voluntary and “expensive” (Brown 1981:63-4)) and ambivalent than that of the Rabbis who are always/already outsiders to a certain extent by virtue of birth into a minority ethnic and religious group and socialization into a different language and literary tradition. On the other hand, Christian culture with its powerful – but by no means univocal – critique of marriage continued to represent a much more radical rejection of Roman cultural values than did that of the Rabbis. I find here, nevertheless, a remarkable example of sharp cultural convergence. This is analogous, in Burrus’s subtle readings, of the ways that power and prestige were both subverted and maintained even by such ascetic figures as Sulpicius (*a fortiori* by bishops such as Ambrose) through their rhetorics of seclusion, withdrawal, and “feminizing asceticism.”

This analysis of Burrus’s proves strikingly productive, therefore, for our understanding of the rabbinic text as well, for it seems that parallel to the development of a discourse of male identification with female virgins among the Fathers, a similar discourse was developing among the Rabbis. The Rabbis also obviously stand in a highly ambiguous position vis-à-vis their version of “Rome.” As we have seen, for them being male also represents a species of danger, danger of being “seduced” into pursuing one of two prostitutes, heretical sectarianism, Christianity (becoming the dominant religion of the empire) or collaboration with Roman power.¹⁰ Thus also for them, the female virgin becomes symbolic of a virtual ego ideal. Another way of saying this would be to mark the gap between the explicit and implicit meanings of the rabbinic text. On the explicit level, the text represents the purity of rabbinic culture, its efforts to remain entirely different and other from Christianity; however, at the same time, via its use of the figure

¹⁰ In a text that I have discussed elsewhere such collaboration is explicitly marked as becoming leonine (Boyarin 1997:88), and “feminine” stealth is recommended as the antidote.

of the female virgin to symbolize its valorized male self – that very self that resists Christianization –, it is indicating, at this distance at least, the convergence of rabbinic culture with that of the Christians, or, perhaps better put, their common cultural history and development. In her habitation of “private” indoor spaces, the talmudic virgin is the figure who is construed as most able to resist the “sexual” seductions of both sectarianism and accommodation to Roman power. To reprise: It is behaving as a male with respect to the “female” blandishments of heresy or collaboration that gets one into trouble; behaving then as a “female” would get one out of it.

For all this convergence, however, it is fascinating to observe lines of difference as well. The use of the virgin as a male identificatory symbol, I will now suggest, is highly dependent on the posture of a given society toward actual virgin girls, and this was crucially different for the Rabbis and for the Fathers of the fourth-century Church. The second crucial factor in ecotypification here is the ecological system of sex/gender within the different subcultures of the Church Fathers and the Rabbis. Up until now, I have focussed entirely on the identification of the Rabbis with the female virgin in the brothel as a symbol of their tricky resistance, their hidden transcript playing, within the brothel of the Empire.¹¹ As such, my strategy has been precisely to downplay the gendered differences of the text, emphasizing rather the ways that the genders are homologized in the narrative, that Rabbi Me’ir doubles the daughter of Rabbi Ḥanina, who doubles Rabbi Eli’ezer in his trickster-escape. These males are feminized figures and finally metaphoricized as the virgin in the brothel. The tricksterism of the virgin daughter thus at one level reprises and spotlights the openness of the talmudic text on the question of tricksters versus martyrs. Even in the very narrative in which martyrdom is being valorized, there is a favored instance as well of tricky escape. Both the defiance of the father and the trickster escape of the daughter seem equally valorized.

However, if we reread that ending, now emphasizing gendered differences rather than disavowing them, we will find very different meanings emerging from the text. In other words, if we move from the level of the virgin as a transgendered symbol of identification for the Rabbis and for the People Israel, to a representative of Jewish female subjectivity, rather than a narrative which opens options for Jewish *people*, we suddenly discover a narrative that shuts them down for Jewish *women*. To put it bluntly: In the rabbinic world, there can be no virgin martyrs.¹² The daughter has to escape from the brothel, not only to reopen and revalorize the trickster option, but also because she must not die a virgin. The female virgin provides as we have seen a highly valued model of rabbinic and patristic resistance

¹¹ This locution was originally applied to the talmudic story by (Adler 1988). For other parallels, see (Malamud 1989:157, 166-67).

¹² For discussion, see fuller version of this chapter to appear in (Boyarin 1999).

¹³ For a extended exploration of the idea that rabbinic Judaism and Christianity are two different systems of sex/gender, see (Boyarin 1998a).

to certain “Roman” cultural values and practices. But this Jewish virgin, insofar as she is a girl and not a mere device for the exploration of male selves (Cooper 1992b), is subtly different it seems from her Christian sisters.¹³ She escapes her fated sexual violation, not as the second century Perpetua – in this case continued marital life –, nor even as the fourth-century Agnes, through open resistance, resistance that ultimately costs her her life but instead through the use of trickster methods, “feminine” wiles, thus escaping both fates, rape as well as death. If the paradigmatic virgin for the fourth-century Fathers remains the virgin in the arena, the paradigmatic virgin for the Rabbis is the virgin in the brothel, who will, in the end, be a virgin bride.¹⁴

The sequel to the story of Thecla in Ambrose forms a remarkable parallel to the talmudic story that we have just read and will help sharpen this point dramatically.¹⁵ On the one hand, it is so close to the talmudic narrative as clearly to count as a variant of the same folktale type, but, on the other hand, the differences between the two culturally localized versions (ecotypes) are as instructive as the similarities.

Ambrose tells of a virgin in Antioch who avoided being seen in public and knowing of the desire of many men for her, declared herself a perpetual virgin, whereupon “she was no longer loved, instead she was betrayed.” The virgin, insisting on her chastity and not afraid of death prepares herself for it. However, her persecutors have a more nefarious plan. They will not give her either the crown of martyrdom nor virginity. After she refuses to sacrifice to the emperor, they send her, like Rabbi Ḥanina’s daughter to a brothel:

At this the young woman, not in doubt about her religion but fearing for her chastity, said to herself: “What shall I do? Today I shall be either a martyr or a virgin. One of the two crowns is begrudged us. But the title of virginity has no meaning where the author of virginity is denied.”[. . .]

Virginity itself is worthless unless it is virginity of God. She will not sacrifice in order to preserve her chastity, any more than she would have to preserve her life. Rather than risking giving up her religion, she chooses to enter the brothel, assuming that like Rahab, she will be forgiven for this. Ambrose continues:

¹⁴ Ambrose, in his *On Virgins*, Book I, chapter IV (15), explicitly distinguishes between the permanent virginity espoused by the Church and temporary chastity, such as that of the Vestals, a fortiori of Jewish girls or the heroines of Greek novels. Note that even in Ambrose’s version of “virgin in the brothel” story, the virgin ends up in the arena, a martyr. See immediately below.

¹⁵ Virginia Burrus both called my attention to this text and its significance as a parallel to the talmudic story, as well as suggesting the direction of interpretation of it as a cross-gendering narrative that I adumbrate below and which will be much more fully developed in her own work on this. I am grateful to her, also, for sharing with me her work in progress that has taught me so much about these texts. As long ago as 1987, Burrus had already pointed out the relevance of the talmudic Rabbi Me’ir story for the Ambrose text, as well as pointing to several other Christian and at least one non-Christian Roman version (Seneca) of the tale-type (Burrus 1987:65, n. 29). Revealingly, in Seneca’s story, the virgin preserves her chastity by killing a man with his own sword, quite different from both our Jewish and Christian female and male tricksters, for all their internal differences as well.

All at once my discourse is ashamed and fears, as it were, to enter upon and relate the wicked course of events. Stop your ears, virgins of God: a young woman of God is being led to a brothel. But open your ears, virgins of God: a virgin can be made to prostitute herself but she cannot be made to commit adultery. Wherever a virgin of God is, there is a temple of God. Brothels not only do not bring chastity into disrepute, but chastity even does away with the disrepute of a place.

A huge crowd of curiosity seekers surged towards the bordello. (Learn the miracles of the martyrs, holy virgins, but unlearn the vocabulary of these places.) The dove was shut up inside, while outside the hawks were loud, contending among themselves as to who would be the first to seize the prey.

In an echo of the lions who were metaphorical representations of male sexual desire in the Thecla sequence, here we find the desiring male represented as a raptor. The virgin prays, invoking the miracle that saved Daniel from the lion's den, and indeed, God vouchsafes her a miracle in the form of a trickster:

She had hardly completed the prayer when all of a sudden a man with the appearance of a fearsome soldier burst in. How the virgin trembled before him.[. . .] "A sheep too may lie hidden in this lair of wolves. Christ, who even has his legions (cf. Matt. 26:53), has his soldiers as well. Or perhaps the executioner has come in.¹⁶ Do not be afraid, my soul: he is used to making martyrs." O Virgin, "your faith has saved you" (Luke 8:48).

The virgin considers the possibility that the fierce soldier who has come in is not a lustful customer but her potential executioner. Perhaps she will be saved by her faith, granted the two crowns of virginity and martyrdom after all. But not, not quite, for

the soldier said to her: "I beg you not to fear, my sister. I have come here as your brother to save my soul, not to destroy it. Heed me, so that you may be spared. Having come in as an adulterer, I shall, if you wish, go out a martyr. Let us exchange our clothing; yours fits me and mine fits you, but both fit Christ. Your garb will make me a true soldier; mine will make you a virgin. You will be clothed well and I shall be stripped better, so that the persecutor may recognize me. Put on the garment that will hide the woman and hand over the one that will consecrate the martyr."¹⁷ While saying this he removed his cloak, which was a garment that until this time was suspected of being that of a persecutor and an adulterer [. . .] When she had changed her clothing the maiden flew out from the snare, but no longer with her own wings, inasmuch as she was borne by spiritual wings. And – what had never been seen before – she left the brothel a virgin, but Christ's.

Ambrose's rhetoric here is very deft. The virgin in the brothel, so far from being a sight that the ages had never seen is practically a topos of this type of literature, but Ambrose (with a wink and a nudge) informs us that this was a sight which had never been seen before.¹⁷ The blind and rapacious audience

¹⁶ I.e., someone who will kill her, not take her chastity.

¹⁷ One wonders at the Ambrose who is so sophisticated a folklorist that he can refer to the parallel tale of the

cannot see the *thauma edestai* that there is before their eyes, an intact virgin leaving the brothel:

Those, however, who were looking with their eyes but did not see (cf. Matt. 13:13), were like wolves overpowering a lamb, raging at their prey. One who was less modest went in. But when with his eyes he had grasped the situation he said: "What is this? A maiden went in but a man is here. This is not that famous story of the hind substituted for the virgin.¹⁸ Rather it is a case of a maiden transformed into a soldier. I had heard and did not believe that Christ changed water into wine (cf. John 2:1-10), but now he has begun to change sexes as well. Let us get out of here while we still are what we were. Have I myself, who see something else than I can believe, been changed too?" I came to a brothel, I see a pledge.¹⁹ And yet I shall depart changed, I shall go out chaste – I who came in unchaste" (Ramsey 1997:96-101).

More violent figures for male desire, but also a very clever moment indeed. The shameless pagan who went in sees a woman changed into a man and fears that he too will be transformed; his sex will also change, and he will exit the brothel a female virgin – that is a Christian. Once more, Ambrose has produced the virgin girl as the type of the Christian male. The Christian soldier disguised as virgin gets caught of course: "He who had been seized in place of the virgin was condemned in place of the virgin. Thus it was not just a virgin but martyrs who came out of the brothel." Here we have another effective rhetorical move in which the identification of the female virgin as male role model is made explicit. The folkloristic figure of the man disguised as woman is explicitly thematized as an appropriation of the name "virgin" by the male martyr, an appropriation which is doubled by the identification of the fathers with female virgins, both martyred and not. In other words, the male Christian cross-dressed as Roman soldier and then once again cross-dressed as virgin martyr produces the same effect of identification for a male audience with the virgin as that produced through the cross-gendering of the lion/ess in Ambrose's retelling of Thecla. The transformation of the second customer makes a perfect double of the transformation of the lion. He also goes in a hyper-male predator – a wolf – and is transformed into a celibate, feminized Christian. The point of identification is, however, made even more palpable here and thus serves as a further interpretative key, guaranteeing Burrus's reading, for

virgin turned into a hind (in the next paragraph) not being aware that here also he is dealing with a virtual "tale-type." His insistence on the uniqueness of this event must be seen, therefore, as a bit of highly effective rhetorical flourish. Alternatively, it could be seen as a very part of the topos itself, as Virginia Burrus has commented to me.

¹⁸ For this tale-type, see (Aarne and Thomson 1987:131). I am grateful to Galit Hasan-Rokem for this information. (Ramsey 1997:222, n. 21) suggests that this is an allusion to the story of Iphegenia. She, however, was translated into a goat, not a hind, so I think rather that we have here a very ancient form of a folk-tale, otherwise only attested in much later sources. Another shared theme between Christian and Jewish legends in this period is the topos of the robber or the prostitute reformed. For the Christian texts, see inter alia (Ward 1987; Elm 1994:258, 318; Chitty 1995:53). or Jewish parallels (Boyarín 1995).

¹⁹ Ramsey notes here: "The 'pledge' (vadimonium) refers to the fact that, as the following paragraph explains, the soldier is a bondsman or guarantee for the virgin. The man in whose mouth these words has been placed has inexplicably grasped the situation" (Ramsey 1997:222, n. 22).

the “female” object, the “virgin” who produces this second conversion is, in fact, this time literally, a cross-dressed man.

The story goes on to report that the escaped maiden, however, returns to the place of punishment. The virgin insists that she must be martyred also, using the very reasonable argument that it was chastity she sought and her chastity is equally in danger now. Moreover, if the soldier is martyred in her place, then she would be guilty of his blood. “A virgin has a place to bear a wound, even if she had no place to bear an affront.[. . .] I have changed my clothing, not my profession. *If you snatch death from me, you have not saved me but circumvented me.*”²⁰ In the end, of course, both achieve the crown of martyrdom together.²¹

The typological connection, perhaps even the genetic connection, between this story and the story of Rabbi Me’ir’s martial disguise is palpable. In both cases, the male rescuer disguises himself as a Roman soldier, a typical customer of the prostitute’s, in order to reveal himself to her as her rescuer. The stories have, however, very different endings. However, the two versions of the narrative are what I have designed religious ecotypes, variations on a traditional narrative motif conditioned by their retelling in distinct religious ideological environments. Rabbi Me’ir’s sister-in-law escapes, and that is the end of her story. The virgin of Antioch is, indeed, not circumvented by being rescued. On the one hand, then, we have here a narrative of female autonomy: She gets to choose her fate, the double-crown of virginity and martyrdom. On the other hand, we have here a narrative of the most extreme form of social control. As Burrus elucidates, the very function of the narrative of the virgin of Antioch is to “obscur[e] the awkward narrative fact of Thecla’s triumphant survival of persecution. It is by juxtaposing Thecla’s story with that of the Antiochene martyr that Ambrose brings Thecla directly [. . .] under the control of the late fourth-century tale of the virgin martyr, with its necessary fatal conclusion” (Burrus 1995b:31). Conversely, the rescue of the rabbinic virgin is as necessary in terms of the rabbinic discourse of gender as the death of the patristic one is for theirs, for were the Jewish virgin to die then precisely her calling as woman would have been destroyed, not preserved. As Chrysostom well put it: “The Jews disdained the beauty of virginity.[. . .] The Greek admired and revered the virgin, but only the Church of God adored her with zeal.”²² For Chrysostom, by the fourth century, rabbinic Judaism with its anti-ascetic tendency is Judaism *tout court*.

For Ambrose, it seems, the primary issue in the symbolization of the virgin as ego-ideal is precisely her virginity – her literal continence interpreted as a model for male celibates, that is, as an abiding sign of Christian resistance to the regimes of heteronormativity and natalism of the Graeco-Roman world. For the Rabbis,

²⁰ Emphasis added. I have substituted “circumvented” from the NPNF translation for Ramsey’s “defrauded.”

²¹ De virg. 2, 19-20 (Ramsey 1997:96-101).

²² On Virginity, 1, 1.

we might say, it is not virginity that is the issue but rather the maintenance of purity in a threatening and impure world, a world in which temptations of heresy and collaboration abound. Rabbinic Judaism, in contrast, for all its alienation from certain aspects of late classical culture, strongly accepts and identifies with the pro-marriage and pro-natal ideologies that were current in their time in the Roman world. Early Christianity, it could fairly be argued, is in large part a powerful resistance movement to this facet of Roman culture. In the Ambrose text about Thecla, her near-martyrdom is caused entirely by her resistance to the dominant Roman cultural norm of marriage and procreation. There is virtually nothing about her belief in Christ, her rejection of pagan gods, or even her rejection of emperor worship here that leads her into the ring with the lions. To be sure, her commitment to virginity was precisely generated out of her conversion to Christianity, but the content of that conversion is, seemingly, more about the virginity than about any other religious practice or belief. And this is typical of virgin martyr acts in general. As Elizabeth Castelli has characterized this type of text in general, "The formulaic character of many of the accounts suggests not an audience expecting novelty, but one finding a compelling spiritual idiom in the repetitions of the triumph of virginal virtue over scurrilous and scandalous male desire" (Castelli, E. A., *Visions* 1995:10), including I would add and emphasize the scurrilous and scandalous desire of "legitimate" husbands. To be fair, this text comes from Ambrose's treatise "On Virginity," so it is not entirely surprising that this should be the focus, but the story as it appears in the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla is not all that different in content, although told not nearly so well there. Early Christian sainthood, I wish to suggest is as much about sexuality and about the resistance to, critique of, and oppositional positioning with respect to a certain regime of power/knowledge about sex as it is about anything else, namely the discourse shared by both pagans and Jews in the late antique city that the foundation of human good is the formation of reproductive families. Rabbi Hanina, on the other hand, is the perfect model of a family man, and in every respect, other than his commitment to the study of Torah, a fine support for the late antique city. The virginity of his daughter, preserved miraculously in the very brothel to which she is sent, will certainly by the end of that story fit her for a proper marriage to a scholar of Talmud, just like her father (although hopefully a more prudent one).

The Rabbi's daughter cannot, therefore, die a virgin. She will have to end up a bride. If for the fourth-century Fathers of the Church, the virgin girl is the very image of perfect completion, for their contemporaries, the Rabbis, she was a chrysalis, perfect pure potentiality. Were this all there were to say about the issue, we would simply have two exactly equally violent systems of oppression of women: one dictating marriage for all and one dictating universal virginity. Indeed, one could argue that the very *longueur* of the Ambrosian narrative is generated by its

necessity to transform a trickster-escape tale into a tale of a virgin martyr. By the time of Ambrose's writing, however, the Christian girl could choose to be a virgin or a bride, for all that the virgin remains more honored.²³

The Rabbi's daughter cannot die a virgin, because she must end up a bride; the Christian girl has two routes open to her: bride or virgin (Elm 1994:337-38). In this respect, early Christianity, even in its post-Constantinian phase reflects a much more radical revision of Graeco-Roman mores than does rabbinic Judaism. Kate Cooper has recently written: "The romance of late antiquity takes [among Christians] the form of a saint's life, in which the chaste desire of the legitimately married hero and heroine has metamorphosed into the otherworldly passion by which a Christian saint embraces a childless death" (Cooper 1996:44). If we accept the current view that one major function of the Greek novels was to reinforce marriage and the reproductive family as the foundation of civic society as recently argued by Cooper among others (Cooper 1996), and that the apocryphal acts, including especially the Acts of Paul and Thecla, were about parodying and resisting that romantic ideology, then the rabbinic text – even this rabbinic martyrology – is ideologically closer to those Hellenistic novels than it is to the apocryphal acts. As Judith Lieu has described them, these last "create a world in sharp conflict with contemporary social structures, rejecting marriage and family life, anticipating and valuing suffering and death" (Lieu 1996:17). One would hardly describe rabbinic culture in these terms.

Elizabeth Clark, and with her several other feminist scholars, have emphasized that the "otherworldly passion" represented a real, if also direly compromised, avenue of autonomy for early Christian girls and women (Clark 1986; Burrus 1987; Castelli, E., *Virginity* 1986).²⁴ Castelli has made the point that "in a tradition where self-representation is a virtual impossibility for women, [Blandina's martyrdom] stands as a remarkable moment of spiritual assertion and refusal to be fully defined by the terms she did not accept" (Castelli, E. A., *Visions* 1995:19). Even this sort of highly compromised option does not exist for our talmudic virgin. Her escape, as it were, is not only an escape from oppression but also, as it were, an oppressive escape, signified perhaps that she has to pass a chastity test before even being deemed worthy of rescue by Rabbi Me'ir. Her escape is not a sign of her freedom. She is constrained to escape, precisely because her virginity is being preserved, like Leukippe, *for* her husband, while the Antioch virgin's, like Agnes's, is being preserved *from* her husband, or rather for her true chosen husband, Christ. In Prudentius's hymn to Agnes, that virgin's telos is rendered with compelling eroticism. Miracles prevent her from being sexually violated, but

²³ As Ambrose emphasizes over and over in the letter to his sister Marcellina that constitutes his tractate, *On Virgins*, he is not condemning marriage. "From the time of Jovinian Catholic writers had to acknowledge the good of marriage or face a charge of heresy" (Cooper 1996:116), and see her p. 97 as well.

²⁴ But see also now (Clark 1998).

none will circumvent her desire for martyrdom. As the executioner approaches her, she speaks:

“I revel more a wild man comes,
A cruel and violent man-at-arms,
Than if a softened youth came forth,
Faint and tender, bathed in scent,
To ruin me with chastity’s death.
This is my lover, I confess,
A man who pleases me at last!
I shall rush to meet his steps
So I don’t delay his hot desires.
I shall greet his blade’s full length
Within my breast; and I shall draw
The force of sword to bosom’s depth.
As bride of Christ, I shall leap over
The gloom of sky, the aether’s heights.
Eternal King, part Heaven’s gates,
Barred before to earth-born folk,
And call, O Christ, a virgin soul,
A soul that aims to follow thee,
Now a sacrifice to Father God”
(Prudentius 1962:277).²⁵

At the point of Prudentius’s writing, however, Christian women were hardly being martyred anymore. The virgin martyr was now the model and type of the ascetic life of the Bride of Christ, the nun (Petruccione 1990:86; Castelli, E., *Reimaginings* 1996; Markus 1990:24), while, of course, the option of carnal marriage was also available for women.

Burrus herself reads this text as “invoking a potential tale of liberation only to subvert that narrative, the poet compromises Agnes’ rescue from sexual violation and indeed undermines her very resistance through his spectacular scripting of her climactic speech” (Burrus 1995b:37-8), Burrus is, of course, exactly correct here. There is no escape from male domination being offered (Sered and Cooper 1996:53-4). At the same time, however, Burrus also highlights the complexity of this very compromising and undermining. The power of the virgin martyr can never be completely eclipsed: “Only by explicitly problematizing female audacity can the tale of the virgin martyr attempt to restrain the heroism of women. And because the tale must therefore become engaged in the construction and contemplation of the heroic *virago*, its message of virginal docility always carries with it the potential for its own subversion” (Burrus 1995b:42). If, moreover, we

²⁵ I have used here the far more beautiful translation found in (Clark 1983:112). See also (Burrus 1995b:36-8) for discussion. The “wild man” is, as Burrus notes, both executioner and Christ bridegroom, but the last lines of the speech add yet another wrinkle, for now the virgin soul identifies herself with Christ as a sacrifice to the Father. The plays of identification and desire are as complex as any neofreudian could possibly want.

remember that medieval Christianity did offer intellectual and spiritual vocations for religious women, however much under the hierarchical superiority of males, while medieval Judaism offered none, then we can, again following Burrus, see this as an incompletely subverted potential tale of liberation (or a partially subverted tale of virginal docility) and not one that is unequivocally compromised and undermined. As Burrus writes, “[Agnes] is not after all audacious *virago* but docile *virgo*,” but insofar as she is an ego-ideal, in turn, for Christian girls, she presents, however compromised, however limited, a possibility of choice of life-path that rabbinic society shuts down completely.²⁶

Only a naive, highly apologetic or triumphalist voice – of which there are unfortunately many – would claim that Christianity bears a feminist message vis-à-vis a misogynist Judaism (von Kellenbach 1994). To be sure, it is a caricature that regards the lives of Jewish wives in antiquity as peculiarly worse than those of their Christian or traditionalist Greco-Roman sisters, or that sees early Christianity as a “feminist” movement, or ignores the “patriarchal” control of even religious women in the Church (Corley 1996; von Kellenbach 1994). As Charlotte Fonrobert has argued: “We have to ask whether in a discourse which builds up an elite of sexual renunciation, in which women are allowed or even encouraged to participate, married women might perhaps fare worse than in a culture in which everybody is required to marry” (Fonrobert 1995:250). And Fonrobert further remarks that “because of its focus on doctrinal questions on the one hand, and on sexual *askesis* primarily for the Christian leadership, on the other, early Christian discourse often neglected to consider the everyday life of those who failed to rise to prominence as hailed ascetics,” i.e., to produce a Christian sexual ethic for them (Fonrobert 1995).²⁷ She has compellingly argued that observance of “Jewish” menstrual purity rules provided an avenue of spiritual fulfillment, of *askesis*, if you will, analogous to virginity for the Jewish-Christian married women of the third-century Syrian community of the *Didascalia* (Fonrobert). The use of a claim of menstruation as a means of “self defense” in the story of Beruriah’s sister above suggests this motive also, a motive that goes back as far as Rachel in the Bible claiming to be menstruating in order to trick her father out of his household gods.²⁸ Fonrobert’s discussion of the *Didascalia* suggests as well that perhaps the exclusion of women from the study of Torah among rabbinic Jews was not as total as imagined either. There is a passage from the Tosefta, also preserved in the Palestinian Talmud which reads: “gonnorheics, menstruants and partiuriens are permitted to read the Torah, to study Mishna, midrash, religious law and aggada, but men who have had a

²⁶ For the extent to which choice of the virginal option was or was not a free-will decision in at least one fourth-century Christian environment, see (Elm 1994:139-40).

²⁷ The near desperation fifth-century Roman text that identifies marriage as martyrdom for women, documented by (Cooper 1996) only underlines this point.

²⁸ I am grateful to Amy Jill Levine for calling this last point to my attention, although I have “processed” it somewhat differently than her formulation. Note the highly charged concatenation of the menstruation as a space for some female autonomy and the trickster role as well.

seminal emission may not" (Berakhot, ch. 2, para. 12). Even those who have taken this passage seriously as an original halakhic text, have understood it as only reflecting a utopian possibility, not a reality of women studying Torah in antiquity. However, the converted Jewish women of the *Didascalia* openly claim that they are not allowed to study Scripture when they are menstruating, suggestive at least, of the possibility that their practice represents another halakhic tradition, the one that the Tosefta speaks against, and that we have some real evidence that at least some Jewish women did study Torah in antiquity. The *Didascalia*, it should be emphasized, is almost exactly contemporaneous with the Tosefta (Sigal 1984:66 and passim).

This is surely the other side of the coin.²⁹ It nevertheless remains the case that Perpetua, Thecla, Agnes and Eulalia paved the way for Hildegard, Julian, and Teresa, all of whom, in medieval Jewish society, would have been only someone's wife and somebody's mother; they could also have been, of course, prominent business-women (Boyarin 1997:158-162), like Glikl or my great grandmother, but not abbesses, writers, theologians, poets. As Castelli has written, "the decision to remain a virgin and to renounce marriage and the world did provide some virgins with an opportunity to pursue intellectual and spiritual activities which would otherwise have been unavailable to them. Especially among educated aristocratic women who wished to pursue a life of study, the life of ascetic renunciation was the only institutionally established means of pursuing intellectual work" (Castelli, E., *Virginité* 1986:82).³⁰ It is not entirely surprising, therefore, that Cher's American Jewish daughter, Charlotte might have fixed on Perpetua as a heroine and model of female spiritual self-realization.

²⁹ On this point, see also the discussion in (Elm 1994:160-61, n. 71 and 171-83).

³⁰ See also (Salisbury 1991; Salisbury 1997).

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, two parallel versions of a narrative motif, the “virgin in the brothel”, are compared. Both are from the fourth century AC, but one is in the Talmud and one in the Christian writer, Ambrose of Milan. Since it can be shown that the variations between these two closely allied texts are correlated with different religious ideologies current among late antique Jews and Christians, it seems reasonable to refer to this type of variation as religious ecotypification.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Aufsatz werden zwei parallele Versionen des Erzählmotivs von der “Jungfrau im Bordell” verglichen. Beide stammen aus dem 4. Jahrhundert nach Christus, davon eine aus dem Talmud und die andere aus dem Werk des christlichen Autors Ambrosius von Mailand. Da gezeigt werden kann, daß die Abweichungen zwischen diesen beiden eng verbundenen Texten in Zusammenhang mit unterschiedlichen religiösen Ideologien stehen, wie sie bei Juden und Christen der Spätantike geläufig waren, scheint es angemessen, diese Art der Variation als eine Bildung religiöser Ökotypen zu bezeichnen.

RESUMO

Comparam-se, neste artigo, duas versões paralelas dum motivo narrativo, a “virgem no bordel”. Ambas são do séc. IV, uma do Talmude e outra do escritor cristão Ambrósio de Milão. Uma vez que se pode provar que as diferenças entre estes dois textos tão próximos estão relacionadas com diferentes ideologias religiosas correntes entre Judeus e Cristãos na Baixa Antiguidade, parece possível designar este tipo de variação como ecotipificação religiosa.